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Mixed Waste Shipment Enables Consolidation of N-Area Storage Facilities

Recovery Act Accelerates Clean-up Project Slated for 2053

AIKEN, S.C. (Oct. 26) – Earlier this month, a shipment offsite of seven barrels of tritium- and mercury-contaminated oil put the Savannah River Site (SRS) on a fast track to remove legacy mixed waste originally scheduled for disposition in 2053.

“Not only is it radioactive for its tritium content, it is hazardous for mercury, which can make treatment of this waste challenging,” said Jacob Nims, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions project engineer. “We had plans to let all of it decay to be able to ship it offsite in the future.” Decaying would have taken 10-50 years. Instead, funding from the Recovery Act accelerated the project as part of the cleanup that will reduce the footprint of the site by 67 percent.

In essence, the removal of the mixed waste frees space in N Area and allows for the consolidation of the remaining waste from a total of 30,000 square feet of space in N Area to a smaller 3,600-square-foot facility in E Area. “The plan is to ship all we can from N Area and move only what is necessary into E Area to allow maximum space for all future generated waste,” Nims said.

The legacy oil, which was generated as early as 1985, includes 70 55-gallon carbon-steel drums welded shut which contain plastic bottles and large kegs of oil. So far, 43 of the 70 drums have been shipped since late February. The process oil was used in equipment at the old tritium facility and had been stored in the Mixed Waste Storage Facilities in N Area and E Area since it was removed from the equipment it once lubricated.

To prepare for shipping, the 55-gallon drums are enclosed in a U.S. Department of Transportation-regulation, 85-gallon drum. The shipment is sent to Diversified Scientific Solutions, Inc., near Oak Ridge, Tenn., where it is run through a combustion unit, enabling the resulting ash to meet land disposal regulations.

“To date, we have shipped 9,600 curies of tritium out of South Carolina,” Nims said.

In addition to the oil, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions will be consolidating contaminated equipment and shipping it to the Materials and Energy Corporation in Oak Ridge for treatment and repackaging before final shipment to the Nevada Test Site for disposal.

After the current shipment, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions will have 27 drums of oil and 36 containers of equipment left to dispose. Once all of the shippable mixed waste has been removed from the E-Area storage facility, the site will begin work to consolidate wastes from across the site into the warehouse, leaving E Area as the Site’s primary waste storage facility.

Currently, wastes are stored in various facilities across the sprawling site. Providing one storage facility will free other areas for closure activities to commence, moving the site closer to achieving the 67 percent footprint reduction goal funded by the Recovery Act.

“This shipment brings us one step closer to our operational footprint reduction goals. The shipment and removal of mixed waste from SRS and the state of South Carolina would not have happened without the Recovery Act,” Nims said.

For additional information on the Department of Energy’s Office of Environmental Management and the Savannah River Site, can be found at <http://www.em.doe.gov> or <http://www.srs.gov>. For more information about the SRS Recovery Act Project, please visit www.srs.gov/recovery.

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Photo Caption: R.E. Rollins moves a palette of tritiated oil drums out of the Savannah River Site's Mixed Waste Storage Building onto the truck. The truck is heading to DSSI in Kingston, Tenn., where the oil will be treated for disposal.

